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Shultz backs first-strike war on terrorists

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WASHINGTON — Secretary of State George P. Shultz declared war on terrorism last night, saying the United States must be prepared to use military force, to suffer losses and to act on incomplete evidence to combat it.

Calling for public support, the secretary said, "We will need the capability to act on a moment's notice. There will not be time for a renewed national debate after every terrorist attack. We may never have the kind of evidence that can stand up in an American court of law."

Mr. Shultz's remarks in a speech to a New York synagogue were the sternest he has used in the administration's growing reaction to terrorism. It appeared as a carefully prepared policy address, a response to a terrorist wave that has killed hundreds of Americans, most of them in Beirut, Lebanon, in less than two years.

There is wide disagreement over the definition of terrorism. As the United States has accused the Soviet Union and others of sponsoring terror, they have replied in kind, especially regarding U.S. policy in Central America. The administration recently withdrew a CIA pamphlet instructing anti-government forces in Nicaragua in techniques for disruption and assassination.

"Clearly we will not respond in the same manner to every terrorist act," Mr. Shultz said. "If we are going to respond or preempt effectively, our policies will have to have an element of unpredictability and surprise. And the prerequisite for such a policy must be a broad public consensus on the moral and strategic necessity of action."

He warned that a tougher policy might cost "innocent lives" as well as military lives. In that regard, he appeared to go further than President Reagan did in his debate with Walter F. Mondale Sunday.

Chided by Mr. Mondale for not retaliating in Beirut, as he had threatened, the president declared: "Yes, we want to retaliate, but only if we can put our finger on the people responsible and not endanger the lives of innocent civilians." At another point he said, "But we are not going to simply kill some people to say,

'Oh, look, we got even.'"

Mr. Shultz traced the development of terrorism in recent years from isolated attacks on individuals to more random mass killings. In some cases, he said, the Soviet Union had encouraged terrorist attack. Sometimes, he said, the goals of terrorists are legitimate; their methods of achieving their goals are not.

The democracies are particularly vulnerable, he said at the Park Avenue Synagogue, partly because of their moral values against violence and partly because their open societies provide easy access.

But "if we truly believe in the values of our civilization," he said, "we have a duty to defend them. ... In a basic way, the democracies must show whether they believe in themselves."

As specific cases, he recalled the attempted assassination of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her cabinet two weeks ago as well as the most recent assault, last month, on the American Embassy in Beirut. He lamented what he called the misguided support of some Americans for terrorism in Northern Ireland. And he cited Israel as a nation that has come to grips with the problem.

The secretary recently made clear his belief that security measures for Americans abroad have been inadequate. He praised Congress last night for providing money to improve security. But his central point was that Americans must understand and support aggressive action to deter, preempt and retaliate — at home and abroad — when terrorist plots are discovered.

"We will certainly not alter the democratic values that we so cherish in order to fight terrorism," he said. "We will have to find ways to fight back without undermining everything we stand for." There should be no "moral ambiguity," he said, about the use of force to protect those values.